FIRST DESIGNS FOR THE THEATRE

By JOHN CUTHBERT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

ELEANOR FARJEON

No.....

PURCHASED FROM THE INCOME OF THE
JOSIAH H. BENTON FUND

FIRST DESIGNS FOR THE THEATRE

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FIRST DESIGNS FOR

THE THEATRE

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John Guthrie

INTRODUCTION

It is an ordeal for a debutant to enter by himself a strange room full of strangers. I promised a young friend that when his time came I would walk with him at least as far as the door.

The time has come, and I realise that my powers and limitations are exactly the powers and limitations of the Head Footman. I can do no more for him than stand at the door, and announce "Mr. John Guthrie!" He must walk in, and make his own impression.

I shall watch with interest – from the doorway—the impression he makes. I remember my own impression when this very young man (he is not yet nineteen) was a very small boy, and showed me the toy theatre he had made, and the plays, figures, and scenic effects he contrived for it. It was the most enchanting toy theatre I have ever seen, and embodied even then, a more positive point of view than nine-tenths of the theatres in London to-day. John Guthrie had not been to London, and did not know the London theatres. He is still at sea in London streets. This may account for the freshness & originality in his work; but it made all the more suprising the birth and development of a positive Point of View in surroundings which have always been rustic.

It is hard to explain how, with practically no contact with the theatre, the strong sense of what he would and would not have in the matter of costume, lighting, grouping, and design, discovered itself in all that John Guthrie did from the age of nine or ten onwards: with the help, it is true, inside the house of books, pictures, and poetry, but outside of hills and windmills, dykes and cornfields, lambs, chickens, and the sea. Among these things, and always making the creator's idea go hand in hand with the craftsman's execution, that Point of View has for years busied itself with inventing ballets,and costume designs for ballets; scenes and costumes for other people's plays and poems; and even startling innovations in modern dress for men—for if the Point of View ever makes itself felt, we shall see our Town Nuts going to their clubs in Florentine capes, and to Soirees in Polynesian cloaks. If such things come about, it will be no part of the Head Footman to look suprised. He must still mind his own business, and announce from the doorway, "Mr John Guthrie!"

ELEANOR FARJEON

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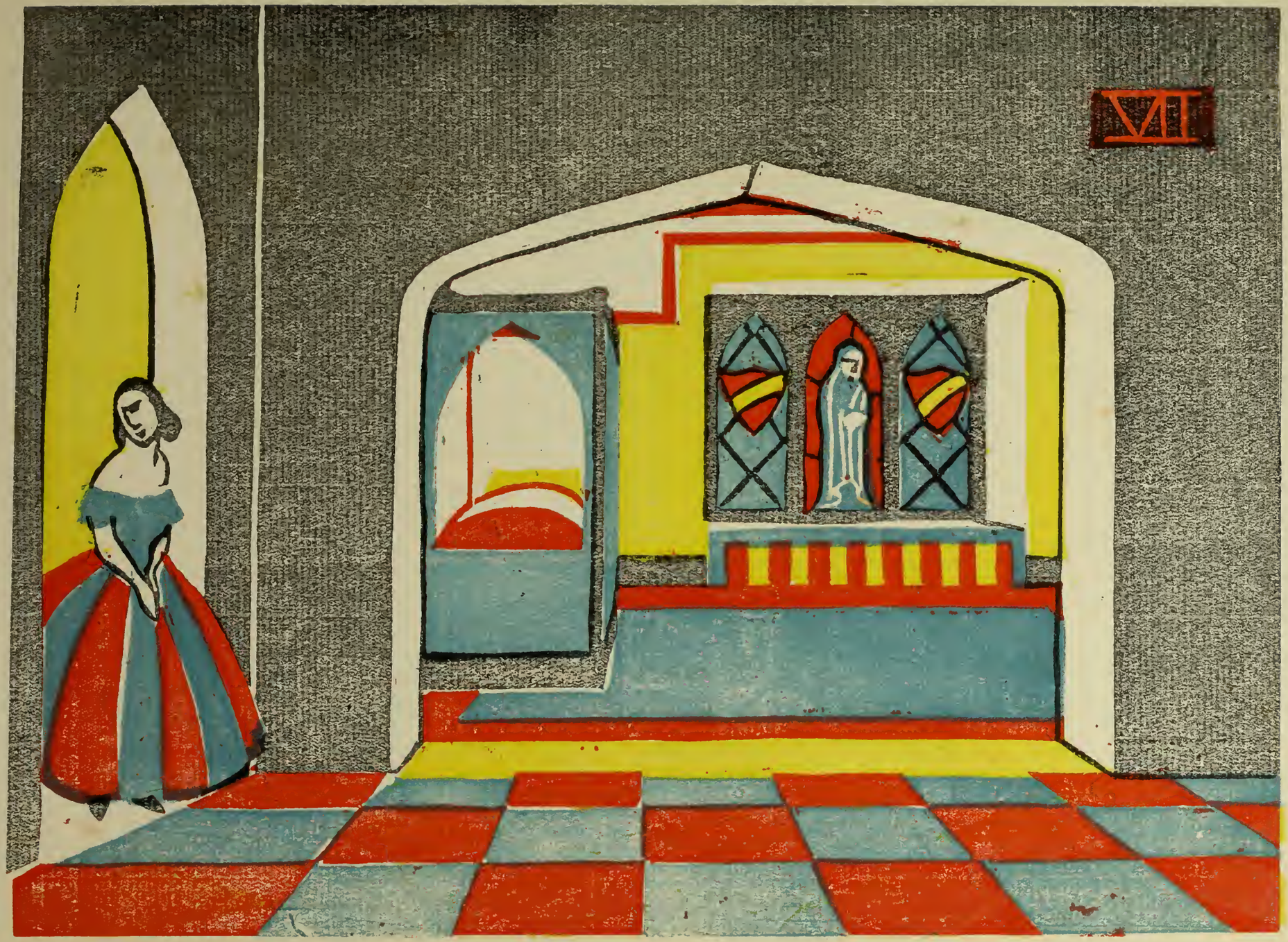
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THE END

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